# Supporting People of Color in Employment

Considerations and Practices by the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute

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As of 2023, the U.S. population is over 334 million. Between births, deaths, and net international migration, the U.S. population increases by one person every 27 seconds.
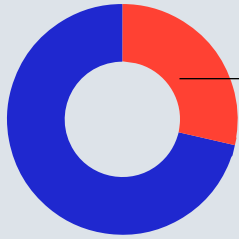
Of these 334 million people, an estimated 40.7% (nearly 136 million) are People of Color.

The United States population is growing rapidly and, simultaneously, becoming much more diverse. As a result, there is increased attention toward both cultural and linguistic competence (CLC), and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). With this increased attention, more and more organizations are requiring training and education regarding CLC and DEI.

Key Terms:

Person/People of Color (POC)

A person of color (POC) is typically defined as someone who is not white or of European ancestry, such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic/Latinx Americans, Multiracial Americans, and Indigenous Americans. POC are traditionally conceptualized as "minority" individuals in U.S. society, but by the year 2050, they are projected to become the numerical majority.

Diversity

Wide range of differences and similarities that define us as human beings; and unique life and community experiences that may include gender, socioeconomic status, age, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, country of origin, disability status, and veteran status. Diversity influences our thoughts, perspectives, and approach.

Equity

Ensuring that each individual has an equal opportunity to obtain their needs. Equity is about fairness and taking deliberate action to remove barriers that hinder overall well-being and incorporate policies, practices, and procedures to promote and facilitate positive outcomes for all.

Inclusion

The practice of creating an environment where all individuals, including their backgrounds and diversity, are accepted, respected, engaged, and valued. A work environment benefits from staff's diversity of ideas, knowledge, and experience; and creates a culture that engages everyone and seeks equitable contributions and opportunities for all.

Cultural Competence

A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Linguistic Competence

The capacity of an organization and its personnel to communicate effectively and convey information in a manner that is easily understood by diverse audiences including persons of limited English proficiency, those who have low literacy skills or are not literate, individuals with disabilities, and those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Two goals of this project are (1) To raise awareness and educate Kentucky employers about issues that People of Color face in seeking and securing employment (2) Promote and support a diverse and more inclusive workplace. Before we provide strategies and practices, it is important to identify barriers and issues that POC face due to lack of DEI and CLC, and additional barriers due to systemic racism. Systemic racism can be entrenched in an institution's employment policies and practices, affecting POC personally and at institutional levels.

Hiring/Job Selection Barriers

POC are underrepresented in the American workforce.

POC are often segregated into narrow ranges of occupations and fields that are characterized by lower status and opportunity.

POC are more likely to be unemployed, under-employed (not being paid enough or not using their full skills and abilities), and temporarily employed than White people.

POC are less likely to be found in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) fields than White individuals.

POC whose names do not sound "White" on job applications receive less responses from potential employers than those applications with "White-sounding names."

Job applications and other necessary paperwork in the hiring process may not be linguistically or culturally accessible (English may not be the applicant's first language, or questions are too intrusive by some cultures, leading to distress and discomfort).

When POC overcome these barriers, they still face barriers to promotions and career advancement:

- POC experience bias and discrimination in succeeding and advancing in the workplace. They experience more difficulty achieving tenure and/or moving into leadership positions.
- POC less likely to be managers, professionals, or hold high-ranking administrative professional positions.

In addition to hiring and career advancement barriers, POC experience discrimination in their actual employment experiences, both from their employers and coworkers/colleagues:

POC may experience racial harassment and hostile environments in both educational and employment settings.	POC may be prone to biased performance evaluations which results in lower scores/rankings, thus impeding their career advancement.
POC may also be held to lower performance expectations- hence limiting their opportunities and leading employers and coworkers to hold negative perceptions of them.	POC may be prone to occupational stereotypes that unjustly "label" them and limit them to a narrow set of characteristics.
POC may overall receive less attention and encouragement from employers and colleagues.	POC may have less access to peer mentors and role models.
POC may feel a lack of authenticity and a need to codeswitch to be taken seriously.	POC may be prone to microinequities, which can be seemingly insignificant instances that build up over time, like providing less workspace to a POC.

The consequences of these experiences are inherent, but here are some additional implications.

People of Color may experience:	
	loss of wages
	loss of health and pension benefits
	lower levels of job satisfaction, career satisfaction, feelings of belonging, and/or organizational support.
	much more difficulty in securing necessary job accommodations
	being prone to having increased turnover and absenteeism

Additionally, salary inequity is a major issue. For employed POC, salaries are often lower than those of White workers, even when their job position, past work experiences, education, and geographic location are the same.

People of Color are often subject to both subtle and blatant racism in the workplace that limits their success. Racism creates stress and unhappiness in their job, which has significant influences on their personal and social lives:

Lowered wages and job opportunities contributing to poverty	Feelings of exclusion, isolation, and lack of encouragement	Lower perceptions of themselves (feeling like they're not good enough, or they're a threat to others)
Anticipate lowered performance evaluations and limited promotional opportunities	Decrease in self-confidence and self-efficacy	Hindered career aspirations and personal achievement goals
Heightened awareness of inequities leading to stress, anger, and worry	Worried about co-worker's judgements	Lack of belonging
Depressed motivation	Perceiving certain cues as threats to their identity, leading to negative behavioral outcomes	Increased distrust, anxiety, depression, and impaired executive functioning
Increased feeling of pressure to be a model minority	Feeling the need to be a good example for their race	

People of Color (POC) experience many barriers to employment due to lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), lack of cultural and linguistic competence (CLC), and systematic racism. Society needs to improve access to opportunity and upward mobility, allowing POC to secure quality education, jobs, housing, and healthcare. Now that we have examined the issues, what can we do about them?

Promoting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion & Cultural and Linguistic Competence

There are numerous resources available to help implement and promote DEI and CLC among staff, participants, and other partners. Before engaging in DEI and CLC efforts, organizations are encouraged to complete two tasks:

1. Conduct an Assessment

Conduct an assessment to determine readiness to address DEI and CLC, determining needs, gaps, challenges, strengths, and organizational capacity. The National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University has developed an assessment, which can be viewed here or at: www.nccc.georgetown.edu/documents/NCCC-CLCADO-Assessment.pdf. Some key points include:

Provide multiple communication channels, like multilingual/multicultural staff, foreign and sign language interpretation services, videoconferencing and telehealth technology, assistive technology, documents using plain language, materials using multiple formats (video, Braille, enlarged print), and more.

Recognize and respect diversity among people, including disability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, religion/spirituality, socioeconomic status, and more.

Feature personal stories from individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse groups in grant writing, publications, conferences, and education.

Represent the cultural diversity of people who reside in the U.S., its territories, and in tribal communities in board members, organizational leadership, staff, consultants, faculty, volunteers, and more.

2. Determine a Budget

Determine a budget to support DEI and CLC efforts. This can include identification of resources, workforce, training needs, and other resources and associated costs. If you need help creating a budget, here are some tips: www.nccc. georgetown.edu/documents/ncccorgselfassess.pdf

Engaging and Taking Action

After these initial steps are completed, it is time to engage and take action. Communicate information regarding your organization's commitment to racial justice, diversity, and inclusion in all programming to staff and partners. Support the development of interest/workgroups to support DEI and CLC efforts. This could involve:
- Allocating time to attend trainings
- Developing DEI and CLC competencies and policies
- Putting competencies and policies into practice
- Supporting inclusive practices across agencies
- Being mindful of your team's composition
- Creating engagement activities for stakeholders, community members, providers, and partner organizations
- Incorporating DEI and CLC into performance and development goals

Here are some examples of trainings, courses, and curricula addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) & Cultural and Linguistic Competence (CLC):

Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging

In this course, explore the Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DIBs) approach, and discover how to activate it in your organization.

www.tinyurl.com/DIBCourse

Managing Diversity

Using real case studies and examples, HR consultant Catherine Mattice helps you create a strategic plan to support diversity and inclusion in your workplace and manage a diverse workforce.

www.tinyurl.com/managediversitylynda

Having Difficult Conversations

In her four-phase model, you'll discover the situations that lead up to difficult conversations, decide when the conversation is warranted, prepare for the interaction, and monitor outcomes to ensure success.

www.tinyurl.com/havedifficultconversations

Managing Multiple Generations

Learn about each generation present in today's workforce, from Baby Boomers to Generation Z, and figure out what each group wants and needs, and how they like to be managed, developed, and promoted.

www.tinyurl.com/managingmultiplegenerations

Cultivating Emotional Intelligence

The course includes information on developing and mentoring your team, creating an engaging workplace, developing political savvy, analyzing your industry, and honing your emotional intelligence.

www.tinyurl.com/cultivateemotionalintelligence

Communicating with Empathy

In this course, communication expert Sharon Steed explains the principles of empathetic communication and shares specific strategies to help improve your approach to difficult conversations.

www.tinyurl.com/communicatingempathy

Managing a Diverse Team

In this course, leadership coach Vanessa Womack equips you with knowledge and impactful strategies that can help you successfully manage, counsel, and lead a diverse team.

www.tinyurl.com/managingdiverseteams

Leading with Emotional Intelligence

In this course, lynda.com director of learning and development Britt Andreatta shows how to develop emotional intelligence to better lead teams, work with peers, and manage.

www.tinyurl.com/leadingwithei

Diversity Recruiting

In this course, Stacey Gordon explains how to confidently approach your leadership team to ensure that diversity is kept in mind when recruiting, and how to successfully implement a diversity recruitment strategy.

www.tinyurl.com/diversityrecruiting

Communicating with Diplomacy and Tact

In this course, communications professor Tatiana Kolovou helps you realize the benefits of communicating with tact and diplomacy in workplace situations.

www.tinyurl.com/communicatediplomacy

Addressing Racism

First, it is worth noting that active, conscious racism exists in our society. Some individuals hold strong, firm, negative beliefs about People of Color and therefore treat them negatively.

Passive, unconscious racism also exists, due to implicit biases that people may hold regarding People of Color. This type of racism is the most common in American society. Let's look at the difference between systematic and systemic racism.

Systematic

Systematic is an adjective that means having or involving a system, plan, or method. You're not doing things randomly.

For example, when you clean your house, you may have a set routine. You may start by cleaning the kitchen and work through the entire house one room at a time. When you are using a set routine to clean your house, you are cleaning systematically.

Systemic

Systemic is an adjective that means "of or relating to a system." It is especially used to describe something that affects every part of an entire system.

For example, diabetes can affect a person's entire body. A person with diabetes may experience: a loss in organ function, poor eyesight, changes in appetite, and more. Because diabetes affects someone's entire body, it is a systemic illness. On the other hand, something like astigmatism only impacts someone's vision.

Systematic Racism v. Systemic Racism

Active, conscious racism, or systematic racism, still exists and can easily be spotted, like hate groups and the use of slurs. On the other hand, systemic racism can be more difficult to recognize. Systemic racism is when racism is **embedded into institutions.** This is typically in ways White people do not recognize or experience. A few of the many examples of systemic racism in the US are:
- Higher rates of arrest among Black people
- Lower rates of hiring compared to White candidates
- Lower wages than White people for the same work

Systematic racism would be closer to active, conscious racism. For example, an employer who refused to interview any person who applied for a job if they were Black. Because it is **intentional**, the employer is engaging in systematic racism.

Starting a conversation about racism and biases can make a significant shift in the treatment of POC. Begin by acknowledging the issue. Provide education about the implicit biases people have regarding POC. Education should take a look at how these biases were formed, what they look like, and how they can be fixed. This requires active, consistent participation and dedication to change on the part of those who hold these biases. It also requires a willingness to explore and confront these biases within oneself. It can be difficult to acknowledge racial bias within oneself. People can identify and challenge their implicit biases in several ways, including:

Self-Educate

Self-educate through books, watching movies and videos, and reading articles about racism and anti-racism.

Books:

- *So You Want to Talk About Race,* Ijeoma Oluo
- *Diversity in the Workplace: Eye-Opening Interviews to Jumpstart Conversations about Identity, Privilege, and Bias*, Bärí A. Williams
- *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, Robin DiAngelo
- *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do*, Jennifer L. Eberhardt, PhD

Other Resources:

- Anti-Racism Resources or http://bit.ly/ANTIRACISMRESOURCES
- Talking About Race, Smithsonian or https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race

Participate in Bias/Anti-Racism Training

View an example of a training here: www.driep.org/anti-racism-training?fbclid=IwAR3ZKrn4hjPmlwbkDXcpQkpt0ThUjwpbV3LDa3rhLuX9a_4NLqCDTPSKrYg

Take an Implicit Bias Test

View an example of test here: www.implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/user/agg/blindspot/indexrk.htm

Privately explore some of your thoughts and feelings regarding racial biases. It may be helpful to acknowledge **all people, even the well-intentioned, have bias.** It is a normal part of human functioning. Keep in mind that these thoughts and biases generally develop unconsciously and can influence our thoughts and actions without conscious thinking or decision-making. You are not a racist or bad person for having these biases. Think about why you hold some of these biases and how they developed. Perhaps your biases came from stereotypes depicted in the media or conversations you had with other biased people in the past.

Once you have identified where your biases came from, you can work toward being more sensitive and conscious in your interactions with POC. Ask yourself "What are my biases toward this person?" and make an effort to **consciously counteract any stereotypes you may hold.**

After you acknowledge the biases you have, increase exposure and interaction. Increased exposure to diverse groups provides the o**pportunity to learn more about people and their cultures.**

It is imperative to create safe space for these sometimes-difficult conversations. Ask questions and avoid making assumptions about people.

Be willing to make mistakes! This is a process. If you say something that you feel may have been racist, biased, or otherwise insensitive, **don't ignore it and don't hope the other person didn't notice.** Address what you said and apologize. **Do not demand the person accepts your apology and do not hold it against them if they are offended or upset.**

Ways to counteract racism/bias and foster a more diverse, welcoming work environment at the organizational/ institutional level include:

Convey inclusive beliefs and values formally through materials, policies, and informally in meetings.

Adopt and/or develop affirmative action policies to recruit and advance qualified POC.

Utilize systematic, structured, and transparent procedures to reduce effects of implicit bias.

Broaden the range of traits and performances assessed during evaluations. By evaluating employees on skills that are more vital to organizational success and unrelated to group stereotypes, organizations can reduce the link between stereotyped traits and evaluation criteria.

Monitor demographic statistics across different positions to identify where segmentation is occurring. This can then be considered when making new job assignments.

Hold meetings and/or workshops for current members/employees that address issues of race and bias. Incorporate some of the activities and discussions described above.

Provide anti-racism training.

Provide educational materials.

Foster norms of non-prejudice and equality (e.g., censuring the use of stereotypes and condemning racist incidents or comments).

Agencies and organizations should acknowledge that combating racism and fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and Cultural and Linguistic Competence (CLC) are not achieved overnight. The job is not finished once the trainings are complete, or the discussions have ended. They must be integrated as vital elements of the organization. This means that discussions surrounding DEI, CLC, and racism must continue to be held. Required trainings and workshops must continue to be implemented. Organizations must continually examine and revise their policies and practices to ensure that diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural linguistic competency are upheld.

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